

Friendonomics
by Scott Brown
from *Wired Magazine*

Hey, want to be my friend? It's more than possible, it's probable. We may already be friends—I haven't checked my email in a few minutes. And once we are, we will be friends *4-eva*. A quick check of my Facebook Friend list shows that I, a medium-social individual of average lifetime popularity, have never lost a friend. Ever. Not one. They're all there: elementary school friends, high school friends, college friends, work friends, friends of friends, friends of ex-girlfriends—familiar names crowd my Friendbox like stars in the sky. I'm Friend-rich—at least onscreen. I've never lost touch with anyone, it seems. This says less about my lovability, I think, than about the current inflated state of Friendonomics.

In our era of instant connection, Twitter updates, and undying memory, keeping friends requires almost no effort at all. We have achieved Infinite Friendspace—we never have to lose old pals or feel the sadness of a lost friend. It also means that even the simplest attachments—the chance airplane seatmate, the office buddy from the first job, the bar-napkin hookup—will be preserved, in perpetuity, in the folder "Friend."

Some argue that Infinite Friendspace is all good. While this reflects our sentimental ideal of lifelong friendship, it's having three catastrophic effects. First, it encourages hoarding. We stash Friends like misers stash pennies—as if we'll run out of them some day. Humans are pack rats, and we'll stockpile anything. Friends are the currency of the socially networked world; therefore, more equals better. But human relations also follow the rules of financial relations: the more Friends there are, the less they're worth. People become simple collectibles, like stamps or shoes.

Second, Friending has taken over the old address book. Sure, it's convenient to have all of your contacts digitally stored, but address books, made from paper, never sent e-vites, asked you to play Farmville, or showed you photographs of its latest dessert. And it never, ever poked you. The address book was all business.

Third, and most grave, we've lost our right to lose touch. "A friend is the masterpiece of Nature," Emerson wrote. He did not mention that like most things natural, friendship is recyclable. We write "Friends Forever" in yearbooks, but really. Come on. Losing old friends allows you to change, adapt, or evolve as you wish—and frees you from multi-friend maintenance. Fine, you can "Remove Friend," but what kind of jerk actually does that?

Deletion is scary, and Facebook tells us it's unnecessary. Server memory is so cheap, we're told, that it can hold all our friends forever in digital memory. But that's what made old style losing touch so wonderful—friendships, like long-forgotten photos, would slowly fade away, naturally, nothing personal. It was sweet and sad and, let's admit it, necessary.

Maybe that's the answer: Let's invent a Facebook app we will call the Fade Utility. The pictures of Untended Friends would gradually display a sepia tone, and the neglected pal will fade. Status updates will turn yellow like old newspapers. We may choose to reach out to the fading friend in some meaningful way—no pokes! Or we might pretend not to notice. Without making a choice, we could simply let that person go. Would that really be so awful?

I've never lost a Friend, you see, and I'm starting to worry I never will. I realize that I may lose a few friends by saying this. I invite them to remove me. I am a grown up, and I understand that life is temporary. The fact that we are all here for only a brief time makes life sweeter. If our technology understood that, then we maybe we would appreciate each other more. I'm not so egotistical that I believe my friendship is eternal. Friends, buddies, pals and hook-ups—keep in touch or set me free. ###

New York University
American Language Institute

1.

Friendonomics

Define the term “best friend.”

What does “best friends” mean in the life of an adult?

Do you have a best friend?

How did you meet your best friend?

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2.

Friendonomics

Define the term “friend.”

What is the value of a friend? What are friends good for?

How long have you known your oldest friend? (“oldest” = the one you have known for the longest time)

What is the difference between “friend” and “family”?

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3.

Friendonomics

Glenn

Glenn

Define the term "acquaintance." How is it different from "colleague"?

Can acquaintances become friends? Describe some ways that can happen.

Think about your daily life in NYC. Where do you encounter most of your acquaintances?

to write an essay about your best friend.